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ABSTRACT

Acknowledging the value of peer evaluation in the classroom, this paper describes the peer evaluation system used in a basic speech communication course at an Ohio university. The first section of the paper defines peer evaluation and describes the situation at the university to provide some understanding of the context in which the system was implemented. The second section provides three major reasons for instituting a peer evaluation system, while the third explains the process of peer evaluation and specifies the criteria used in evaluation, how the students were trained, and how standards for evaluation were kept high. The fourth section discusses objections to peer evaluation that frequently occur, and the fifth examines six important results of peer evaluation: (1) a widening of horizons, (2) an introduction to the joys and dangers of generalizing, (3) the development of skill in avoiding hyperbolic and authoritarian assertions, (4) the reconciliation of the emotional with the rational, (5) the development of a sense of responsibility, and (6) an increased ability to assimilate information. A summary section notes the strong relationship between peer evaluation and active education, and the important functions peer evaluation serves in a basic communication course. (HTH)

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PEER EVALUATION:
A CASE STUDY

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Abstract

Peer evaluation involves assessments provided by students as they critique the performance of other students. In this case study, the system of peer evaluation used in a basic speech communication course is explained, the values and rewards are discussed, the approach is specified, objections are presented and the position of the course director is offered on each objection. Peer-evaluation is an active learning technique that causes students to think, ask questions, and respond. The system emphasizes skills and effective performance; it focuses on learning well-defined, specific criteria of effectiveness; and it encourages active student involvement. (97 words)

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Running Head: Peer Evaluation

PEER EVALUATION:
A CASE STUDY

Students are concentrating on the key factors that contribute to effectiveness in interviewing. Some occasionally look at the ceiling or floor as they focus their thoughts. All are involved in judging those with whom they have just interacted--their peers--and all are making assessments that contribute to their colleague's grade on this effort and to their colleague's final grade in the course. Peer evaluations are an important, ongoing, pervasive feature of their basic speech-communication course, and most students take the process seriously.

In this article the peer-evaluation system is described, the values and rewards of the system are explained, the approach is discussed, and the major objections are offered. To each of the objections the position of the course director is provided. This system may not be appropriate for all classroom situations, students, or instructors, but it has some clear strengths. The uniqueness of the system in this case study is the extent of its use and the number of students using it.

DESCRIPTION

In this section peer evaluation will be defined. In addition, the situation at _____ will be explained to provide some understanding of the context in which the system is implemented. Finally, some of the basic requirements and expectations are detailed. The approach used to implement the peer-evaluation system will be discussed in a later section.

Definition. Peer evaluations are those assessments provided by students as they critique the performance of other students. In the situations to be described, students use carefully constructed evaluation instruments in highly structured, classroom situations.

Situation. Speech 102, the basic-communication course at _____ _____, is a three-hour course required for most students. Over ninety-five percent of those who enroll in it, take it because it is required. Students meet once-a-week in lecture and twice-a-week with a graduate teaching assistant in performance sections of twenty students each. It is a course in which there is a balance between theory and practice. Students receive the theory through lectures and from required textbooks; they gain practice in the performance sections where the peer evaluation occurs.

The course, taught on the semester system (15 weeks) is divided into three parts: 1) interpersonal communication, 2) small-group communication, and 3) public communication. In each of these areas, students receive five lectures and perform two graded assignments.

All assignments in the course are weighted. There are a total of thirty units, twelve of which are accounted for by the three examinations at four units each. Also, three units are assigned by teaching assistants for attitude and participation. In the interpersonal communication part of the course, students write a three-unit paper based on a dyadic encounter.[1] Their second assignment in this part is a two-unit, in-class information interview which is entirely peer evaluated.

Students' first assignment in the second, small-group part of the course is a two-unit, two-day, in-class learning group which is peer-evaluated.[2] Their second small-group assignment is a three-unit problem-solving discussion

which is performed in front of all class members. In this case, students use peer evaluations, but their responses are weighed equally with the evaluation of the graduate teaching assistant, using the same forms.

In the final part of the course, on public communication, students give a two-unit informative speech. Their second speech, and the final assignment of the course, is a three-unit problem-solving (persuasive) speech. In both instances, peer evaluations count half of the performance grade. However, in the informative speech this accounts for just twenty-five percent of the total speech grade since an outline counts half the grade. In the persuasive speech, the outline counts a third of the grade, peer evaluations count one third, and the graduate teaching assistant controls a third.

Peer evaluation counts as a significant portion of each student's final course grade. It amounts to approximately 5.58 units out of thirty, or about 18.6% of the final grade. The reason it is approximate is because teaching assistants are given some control over how much to count it during the final three assignments.

Requirements. The requirements and expectations for students enrolled in the basic course are not unlike those elsewhere. Speech 102 is a freshman-sophomore level course. Students are expected to take the course seriously. This means that they attend class regularly, prepare thoroughly for each of the assignments, and come to class familiar with the appropriate evaluation forms.

The first requirement is obvious--students are required to attend class. As obvious as that may be, introductory-level, required courses have a notoricus attendance problem. The Speech 102 attendance policy is publicized and reinforced. Students are allowed two absences from performance sections.

After two, their final course grade is lowered by one-third for each successive absence. Lecture attendance is neither taken nor counted--which allows some flexibility in the over-all policy. The material in lecture, however, is essential to doing well in the performance sections, and it receives much attention on the examinations. Lecture attendance is normally high. The attendance policy works to help guarantee presence for the activities for performers as well as for observer-critics.

The second requirement is preparation. Motivation for preparing for assignments comes from four sources. The most important and influential is peer pressure. Students do not want to lose face in front of their classmates. Graduate teaching assistants are also motivators. They receive their instruction from the course director and from an instructor's manual designed especially for them. Because they know what is coming next, they can give notice, gain commitments, and outline assignments well before they are due. Lectures provide motivation as well. They are designed to coordinate and reinforce the other parts of the course. A final motivator are the peer-evaluations themselves. Although the evaluations that students fill out are not graded, teaching assistants can evaluate these with a +, ✓, or a -. Also, whether an evaluation is received from a student is recorded. Since assistants retain ten percent of students' final course grades and award those on the basis of attitude and participation, this helps encourage students to prepare.

The third requirement involves students being familiar with the rating forms. Here, nothing is left to chance. For each of the activities where peer evaluation will be a major part of students' grades, a sample of the activity, with evaluation, is conducted during class time. Teaching assistants facilitate discussions after these sample activities during which the

central issue is the understanding and use of the evaluation rating forms. Questions about terminology and meanings are handled at this time. Thus, before students use the rating forms to evaluate their peers, they have an opportunity to use those forms in a non-threatening, ungraded situation.

VALUES AND REWARDS

Why use the peer-evaluation system? There are three major reasons for instituting such a system. These reasons are clear strengths. Any one of them would be sufficient to justify its use. The reasons include the emphasis the system places on practice (skills), the focus it gives to learning, and the active involvement it encourages.

Emphasis on Practice. If each graduate teaching assistant had to view every performance of each of the twenty students enrolled in his or her section of the course, the number of performances would necessarily be small--perhaps four or five activities. With peer evaluations, teaching assistants do not have to view each performance. For both the interviews and the learning groups, they become facilitators, monitors, and over-all, brief observers. In this way, each student is able to serve as interviewer and interviewee twice as well as perform in two learning groups. This also diffuses the weight of any single peer evaluation.

Peer evaluation emphaiszes practice in another way as well. Students are participating in more than just the activity they prepared for outside of class. They are player and critic. The interactive function of being participant and self-critic is activated. There is greater likelihood that students will evaluate their own performances if asked to evaluate the performances of others. They will will bring the same criteria they use to judge others to bear on their own activities.

Focus on Learning. Much effective learning takes place through repetition and reinforcement. When students are asked to use the same criteria over and over, there is more chance that the criteria will be internalized. With internalization, the likelihood of transfer to similar performances outside the classroom is greater. That is, when students hear or see an interview, small group, or public speech, they are more likely to use those internalized criteria as their means of assessment. This reveals the importance of criteria selection.

Active Involvement. It is clear that students learn more when they are actively involved in an activity. Peer evaluation requires alertness and responsiveness. It cannot be engaged in without some level of involvement, however minimal. Minimal involvement can usually be detected by an alert teaching assistant, and such situations can be handled when they occur.

But active involvement means more. Students are contributing to the grading procedures of the class. Involvement for the sake of involvement is unlikely to have the same effects. Because their evaluations count in a real, direct way, there is incentive--motivation--to do a good job.

The involvement of students, too, has real-life applicability. Students are evaluating activities that have an analog in their lives. As they become more familiar with evaluating, and as the criteria become easier to use, students will feel more at ease assessing the effectiveness of interviews, groups, and public speeches.

APPROACH

There is more to the process of peer evaluation--and to the integrity of the whole system--than simply the desire to implement it. Basically, the effectiveness of the procedure depends upon its presentation. In this section

explanation of the process will be discussed, the criteria used will be specified, how students are trained will be mentioned, and the way standards are kept high will be clarified.

Explanation of the Process. The stage is set for the peer-evaluation process at the first lecture of the course. Students are told that education, to be effective, depends both on skills and understandings. The skills in a speech-communication course are obvious, but the understandings, often, are not. At the beginning of the lecture, students are told that much of the course will focus upon their skills at observing, analyzing, and making predictions about communication. Toward the end of the lecture it is stated that according to humanistic psychologists, the best source of education is threefold: a here-and-now focus, while observing our own and others behavior, while we are learning about that behavior. They are told that Speech 102 will focus on their current speech-communication skills; that the peer-evaluation process will encourage them to observe their own and others' speech communication skills; and that while engaged in this, they will be learning about speech communication in the lectures and from the textbooks.

The second lecture clarifies the interviewing assignment. This is the first assignment when peer evaluation will be used. At this time students learn about the importance of the process, how much it counts in other students' grades, and the importance of credibility.

The opening look at credibility is brief. Students are introduced to the importance their early impressions on other students are likely to have. It is noted how credibility is built slowly but can be destroyed in an instant by carelessness or lack of concern. Peer evaluation requires responsibility and concern for those impressions--throughout the course.

Toward the end of the explanation of the first peer-evaluated activity--the informative interview--some further notes on peer evaluation are offered. For example, the need to be familiar with the criteria on the critique forms is stressed. Page numbers of those forms are given.[3] The need for preparation is emphasized. Finally, a moment is spent reinforcing the need to be fair, accurate, and discriminating in use of the rating forms. Along with this reinforcement, students are told that they will be treated as adults who can handle the kind of responsibility that peer evaluation entails.

Specification of the Criteria. The criteria to be used in evaluating students is supplied for them. They are specified on 8½ x 11-inch critique sheets contained in the "Skills" book required for the course.

To get the criteria, books, authorities, and others were consulted. The primary question was, "What are the essential criteria that determine effectiveness as an interviewer?" --or "as a small-group leader?" --or "as a public speaker?" Six criteria were selected in each case. When subdivisions of these six criteria were necessary, these were included on the rating forms. Each factor, then, was to be assessed on a scale of 1-7: 1 being poor, 7 being superb. Thus, the highest evaluation a student could get on all six factors was 42--the top rating. Samples of two of these forms are provided in Figures 1 and 2.

--INSERT FIGURES 1-2 HERE--

To reinforce the peer-evaluation system, teaching assistants utilize similar six-factor forms in their assessment of other student activities. The dyadic-encounter paper, evidence for the problem-solving group, and all outlines for speeches are evaluated in this manner. This provides students with models of the evaluation process in action. This, too, gives teaching assistants a great deal of experience handling the rating forms.

FIGURE 1

Interviewer's Name _____ Critic's Name _____

CRITIQUE OF INTERVIEWER

Instructions: Please give a qualitative evaluation for each of the six factors by circling the numerical score which in your judgment best represents the interviewer's performance—7 = excellent, 4 = good, and 1 = poor. Check the items under each factor (✓) that were accomplished by the interviewer. Also, total your numerical score and place that total in the final blank space below.

RATING

1. Opening the Interview 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

_____ Introduced himself/herself
_____ Stated purpose
_____ Built rapport
_____ Motivated interviewee

2. Body of the Interview 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

_____ Appeared organized
_____ Followed clear pattern

3. The Questioning Process 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

_____ Used well-planned questions
_____ Had sufficient questions
_____ Questions were adapted to interviewee and situation
_____ Questions were reflective of the interview's purpose (goal)

4. Closing the Interview 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

_____ Summarized main ideas
_____ Acknowledged other's help
_____ Indicated future accessibility
_____ Close appeared nature, comfortable, and easy

5. Interpersonal Factors 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

_____ Established good relationship with interviewee
_____ Perceived interviewee's needs
_____ Respected the interviewee
_____ Dealt with conflicts
_____ Refrained from dominating the interview
_____ Had interviewee self-disclose

6. Speaking Skills 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

_____ Used credible and persuasive vocal tone
_____ Listened well throughout the interview
_____ Used effective nonverbal cues
_____ Used appropriate language

TOTAL POINTS: _____

Additional Comments:

FIGURE 2

Leader's Name _____ Critic's Name _____

PROBLEM-SOLVING DISCUSSION EVALUATION

CRITIQUE OF LEADER

Instructions: Give a qualitative evaluation for each of the six factors by circling the numerical score which in your judgment best represents the leader's performance—7 = excellent, 4 = good, 1 = poor. Use the items below each category as a basis for your additional comments below the scales. Total your score please (6-42 points).

RATING

1. Leader opened discussion effectively — 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

   _____ Defined purpose
   _____ Created proper climate
   _____ Suggested structure and procedures
   _____ Asked first question

2. Leader helped establish proper socio-emotional climate — 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

   _____ Allowed some free talk
   _____ Maintained group focus
   _____ Encouraged participation by all
   _____ Controlled compulsive talkers
   _____ Supportive of the group
   _____ Enjoyed the discussion and presented positive outlook

3. Leader structured the discussion — 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

   _____ Kept goal oriented
   _____ Followed an agenda
   _____ Summarized after each major point and at end
   _____ Used transitions
   _____ Watched for and controlled excessive digressions
   _____ Brought discussion to a close

4. Leader revealed cooperativeness in attitude — 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

   _____ Listened well
   _____ Responsible
   _____ Agreeable
   _____ Open-minded
   _____ Cooperative and helpful

5. Leader spoke well — 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

   _____ Clear
   _____ Spoke to the group
   _____ Concise and not long-winded
   _____ Loud enough
   _____ Alert, active, interested
   _____ Respectful and considerate of other group members

6. Leader's overall contribution and value to the group — 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

TOTAL POINTS: _____

Additional Comments:

Training Students To Use It. Most of the "training" that undergraduates receive in using the peer-evaluation rating forms rests in the hands of the graduate teaching assistants. And most of that occurs on the days when the sample activities are conducted, evaluated, and discussed. There is no way to judge their success, however, because of the simplicity of the forms and terminology, success is almost assured.

During the sample activities, graduate teaching assistants use the same forms to evaluate the activities as the students. After the activity, undergraduates are asked to share their assessments. It is at this point that social-facilitation begins to occur. As students see how others, and their instructor, respond to the performances, they are more likely to bring their own responses--especially those that occur when activities are actually graded--into line with what they hear. The point of these discussions following activities is to establish some general standards for students to follow.

Training also occurs through actual use. Students identify the forms they write. If their evaluations are excessively high or low, teaching assistants can trace the rating forms to their author and help guide them to make their assessments more accurately. Occasionally, a critic may be rewarding a friend or penalizing an enemy. Sometimes, too, students may think that if they penalize everyone else by giving them low scores, their own grade will come up. Another problem occurs when students do not want to evaluate their peers, and, to rebel, they give everyone a top score. These problems can usually be identified through personal conferences with students. To treat the problem of excessively high or low scores, teaching assistants are instructed to throw out excessively high or low scores.

The training that occurs through practice occurs in fairly low-risk, low-threat situations. The first and second activities when peer evluations are

used are two units each. Other activities count three units each--or ten percent of students' final course grade. In the first activity, the interview, a student's grade is made up of eight separate critiques. The students operate in triads and serve as interviewer, interviewee, and observer twice each on two separate activity days. Each time they are an interviewer or interviewee, they are evaluated. The activity as a whole counts less than seven percent of their course grade; thus, each separate critique contributes less than one percent (.0083) to their final course grade. The learning-group activity, the second one in which peer evaluations are used, operates in a similar manner. They permit peer evaluating in nonthreatening situations and allow teaching assistants to monitor and handle any problems that are occurring.

Keeping the Standards High. One problem with students evaluating other students is that they tend to give high grades. Nobody wants to appear tough, or too severe, on another classmate for fear of retribution or unhappiness. If this is true, then how do teaching assistants discriminate?

Peer evaluations are converted into letter grades, however, using a traditional curve would translate a 38-42 from the rating form into an "A," a 34-37 into a "B," a 29-33 into a "C," a 25-28 into a "D," and a 24 or below into an "F." If this system were used, mostly "A's" and "B's" would be awarded for each activity. There is a more effective system that discriminates better.

All evaluations given on a particular day, from a particular form, are averaged so that a final one to forty-two score is obtained for each student. These are arranged in chronological order. We do not use a bell-shaped curve because this would assure that some students would get "A's" and the same number of students would get "F's." In small classes of twenty, this has not worked well. Rather, teaching assistants are trained to eyeball their results and to develop the grade categories based on their own monitoring, observations,

and feelings. Generally, they award the top ten percent of the scores an "A," the second forty percent or so a "B," and the lower fifty percent or so "C's," although this is likely to vary dramatically from section to section. The point is, there is no set quota. The cut-off points can vary from section to section, from activity to activity, and even from day to day during the same activity.

Teaching assistants help their students discriminate. They maintain grading standards by scrutinizing all rating forms, by reporting back to the class the progress the class has made in discriminating, and by continually reminding students to be fair, accurate, and discriminating. This is reinforced in lecture as well.

Sometimes students want to give other students a fair, or even generous, grade for just showing up at class. In lecture, students are told that if students do not speak up, do not come prepared, or talk too much (as sometimes occurs in the cooperative group discussion activities), they are to be given a one--or even a zero--on the appropriate criteria. The idea that is reinforced is that points are not given to students on any factors just for being present in class. This sanctions severity in such cases and permits discrimination.

OBJECTIONS

Peer evaluating is not liked by everyone. Objections occur, and many of them are legitimate. They appear even more legitimate if they cannot be adequately addressed. Objections include lack of training, not having the responsibility for doing it, lack of seriousness, lack of desire, and the distraction it causes. For each objection, a typical course-director response is offered.

"I'm not trained to do it!" Students will say they have no training to perform peer evaluations. That is the major reason why we provide training! Often, this reaction will come early, before they have had much practice. The more practice they get, the easier the process becomes, and the less this complaint is heard.

Another way to deal with this complaint is in the selection and wording of the criteria. If you examine the rating forms, you will find the criteria and terminology simple. If we become technical, for example, when we use the Benne and Sheats group task and group building and maintenance roles,[4] the terminology is explained in lecture or in the readings.

Also, as students observe other students using the process--largely without complaint--the system begins to work. It is one of those things that is an integral, automatic part of the basic course. Students are warned early that peer evaluation is used; thus, they can become accustomed to the requirements and expectations long before they actually engage in it. The mental conditioning that comes first is important to student acceptance.

"But it's not my job." On the surface this appears to be a legitimate concern. After all, who is being paid to conduct the class, the instructor or the students? In calmer moments, however, one wonders who decides who plays which roles? Why can't evaluation be just as much a student function as an instructor function? Who decides?

In some cases, this issue is more a smokescreen for a deeper concern. Most students have not performed peer evaluations before. Thus, they consider the system new and different. What is new and different is ipso facto to be decried--especially if they feel uneasy about the system or unqualified. Once again, their fears are reduced through practice. Once involved, this particular complaint is seldom raised again.

"Some students don't take it seriously." Of course, some students do not take the whole course seriously! Or even life! It is this complaint that has made instructor scrutiny and even a +, ✓, and - system an important part of the process. When cases occur where students are not taking the process seriously, there is a built-in procedure for dealing with those instances at once. If students know this system exists or see it in progress, they will be less likely to raise this complaint.

Peer pressure operates, too, to encourage students to take it seriously. Teaching assistants cut off critics' names and pass the rating forms back to those who were evaluated at the completion of each activity. Although most students receiving the forms do not try to discover who filled out which evaluation form on them, they can find out if they are willing to exert the effort necessary. Most students do not want to appear too far out-of-line, or too severe, in their reactions to others. Most do take the process quite seriously.

"I don't want to do it." Some students are lazy; they would prefer doing nothing to something--to anything! For most students, the reinforcement they get from the director/lecturer, from the teaching assistant, and from their peers is sufficient.

Also, the peer-evaluation process is an integral part of the course; it is not tacked on. If students can be made to think (questionable?) that the process is stimulating and challenging, they may be more interested in it. If it is part and parcel of the entire learning process in the basic course--that it cannot be separated from the learning that is expected--students are less inclined to rebel. It is always true, however, that external behaviors do not necessarily reflect an internal commitment. There are no guarantees.

"It detracts from listening." Students using this objection suggest that having to evaluate creates a distraction so that they cannot follow what is going on. They would rather listen and follow than critique and write. For some this is likely to be true. For others, the process may cause them to follow better because it prompts alertness and responsiveness.

The process may place the emphasis where it should be placed. The basic-communication course, in general, is designed to emphasize process, not product. That is, how an activity is performed is often more important than the actual subject matter. The result of this orientation is that if students succeed in using a format (interviewing, small-group leadership or membership, public speaking), they can insert any content into that format--with necessary adaptations--and be somewhat assured of success. But because of this orientation, there needs to be less concern with students listening to the subject matter and following all developmental aspects, and more concern with judging how other students utilize the format. Obviously--if you examine the rating forms--there is a blend. It is not all one (process) and not the other (product). There is little doubt that those who have trouble listening and writing are discriminated against in peer evaluation.

What this boils down to is an essential question: Would the director rather have students evaluating others and learning the criteria for assessing effectiveness or would he or she rather have them listening without evaluating? One of the reasons for implementing this process originally resulted from in-class visitations. Students watching and listening to the performances of other students were observed, for the most part, in nonverbal postures reflecting disengagement, inattention, and even sleep. Peer evaluations give students something active to do while others perform. Active listening, unfortunately, is not always active enough!

RESULTS

Why are we educating students? The results reported here appear to support some important reasons. Peer evaluating can have the following kinds of results: 1) widening horizons, 2) introducing the joys and dangers of generalizing, 3) avoiding hyperbolic and authoritarian assertions, 4) reconciling the emotional with the rational, 5) developing a sense of responsibility, and 6) assimilating information.[5]

Widening horizons. Peer evaluation helps students increase their own capacity. That they can be shown that they are trained to do it, or that they are capable of handling it may be widening-enough for some. For others, they need to learn what is considered "effective" in areas that are often thought to be highly subjective. What are the standards in human communication? Peer evaluation is a procedure that helps objectify a subjective process.

Introducing the joys and dangers of generalizing. When we hear people communicate, we make generalizations based on their communication: "that doesn't make sense," "that's absurd," or "I didn't know that." But, in general, there is a human tendency not to subject data to scrutiny. We seldom apply any tests to human communication. Rather, we allow ourselves to be the subjects of sweeping generalizations. At times, true, we can find joy in generalizing; but when content matters, we need to be serious about the process. Peer evaluation focuses clearly and directly on the process.

Avoiding hyperbolic and authoritarian assertions. It is easy to produce extreme statements and to avoid suspending our judgment. In her chapter on "Why educate? And why assess?" Heim, herself a concerned educator, writes the following:

> It is also easier to attract attention and be provocative by talking in superlatives and drawing invidious distinctions than it is by restricting oneself to balanced views. One of the aims of education is surely to inculcate a love of rationality and fairmindedness without any loss in spontaneity and vividness.[6]

Using critique forms with specific, well-defined criteria provides a clear basis for making judgments about effectiveness. When teaching assistants conduct class discussions of students' performances, the evaluations shared can be rational and fair-minded. Rather than,"I thought it was good," performances can be tied to the specific criteria for effectiveness: "It was good because it. . . ."

Reconciling the emotional with the rational. Closely tied to the result above is the process of teaching students to reconcile the emotional with the rational, especially when these conflict. Should we deny the existence of value judgments and emotions? Of course not. They must be admitted, and they must be incorporated into what is being studied and taught. This can be done in the peer-evaluation process and, too, in the discussions which should be part of the process.

When students become emotionally affected by a performance, sometimes they have no basis for their reaction: "I don't know why I liked it, I just did." Having critiqued a performance using specific criteria, there is a much greater likelihood that they will be able to explain their feelings or, at least, provide a rational basis for their reaction. Peer evaluations offer a method for describing the rational basis for emotional responses.

Developing a sense of responsibility. Why do you feel the way you do? On what do you base those judgments? How did you come to that position? Legitimate questions? Educated people develop a sense of responsibility to them-

selves and others. They need reasons; they need priorities. Peer evaluation causes students to develop faith in themselves. They can back up their reactions and responses with substance. They can speak intelligently about oral performances with some assurance about the accuracy of their assessments.

Peer evaluation involves students in the assessment process. Because they know the criteria and can apply them, they become answerable or accountable for their responses. Further, as they become involved in the process, they begin to recognize what is right and wrong behavior--that is, behavior that either does or does not contribute to effectiveness. As their evaluation feeds back into their own actions, they become more accountable for their own behaviors. Peer evaluation developes a sense of responsibility.

Assimilating information. When the criteria for effectiveness are used over and over, the assumption is that many of the criteria will be assimilated--absorbed and incorporated as a natural part of students' response behavior. When these criteria are also used in discussion, even the appropriateness of certain criteria to certain performances can be weighed. Students can then decide which criteria are worthy of absorption and which are not.

Probably most important, however, as students can discuss how they responded and why, a model of an educated person is being presented. Students should not be rigid, metallic receptacles into which facts are merely poured. They need to act on and respond to facts, to become a more "flexible, porous body which, like the amoeba, will change shape and size as it absorbs nutriment."[7]

SUMMARY

There is a strong relationship between peer evaluation and active education. It is an active learning system which causes students to become

more involved in their learning environment. It encourages them to think and to ask questions because it forces them to respond to specific criteria. After all, what is the real object of education? --to leave students in the condition of continually asking questions. The process of making assessments through peer evaluations contributes positively to a questioning posture.

Peer evaluation also serves important functions for a basic-communication course. It emphasizes skills and effective performance. It focuses on learning well-defined, specific criteria of effectiveness. Finally, it encourages active student involvement. Normally, peer evaluation makes up a very small part of basic-communication courses or rating forms are used only during the public-speaking section of courses. Peer evaluation, as presented here, is an integral, ongoing, important function of the whole course. The goals outlined above can be accomplished through a well-designed, properly organized, and successfully implemented peer-evaluation program.

Footnotes

[1] Richard L. Weaver, II, "The Creative-Innovative-In-Depth-Dyadic-Encounter," The Ohio Speech Journal, 18 (1980): 92-93.

[2] See Donald W. Klopf and Ronald E. Cambra, Speaking Skills for Prospective Teachers (Englewood, Colorado: Morton Publishing Company, 1983), pp. 283-287.

[3] Richard L. Weaver, II, Speech Communication Skills (San Diego, Calif.: Collegiate Publishing, Inc., 1982), pp. 57-61. These are the pages mentioned to students for the interview assignment.

[4] Kenneth D. Benne and Paul Sheats, "Functional Roles of Group Members," Journal of Social Issues, IV, No. 2 (1948), pp. 41-49.

[5] Alice Heim, Teaching and Learning in Higher Education (Great Britain: NFER Publishing Company, Ltd., 1976), pp. 109-110.

[6] Ibid., p. 110.

[7] Ibid., p. 110.